

## **U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Safety Requirements for Domestic Commodity Purchase**

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) work together to purchase and distribute food products for National School Lunch and other federal food nutrition assistance programs. AMS purchases meat, poultry, fish, fruits, and vegetables. FSA purchases other agricultural commodities including, but not limited to, flour, bakery mix, peanut products, cereal grain products and dairy products. FNS is responsible for the distribution of these products to the various recipients.

### **General Requirements:**

All purchases adhere to the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) and contracts include provisions to ensure the receipt of food that meets quality specifications and all food safety requirements established by the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in accordance with federal laws and regulations (Federal Meat Inspection Act, the Poultry Products Inspection Act, Egg Products Inspection Act, Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act and the Fair Packaging and Labeling Act). Specifications for some products include additional safeguards, such as microbial product testing and facility inspections beyond those required by FSIS or FDA.

Prospective AMS contractors must successfully demonstrate the ability to provide a safe, quality, and wholesome product by meeting specific qualifications prior to bidding on a contract. Once approved and awarded a contract, an AMS agent examines all processing and packaging operations in accordance with contract specifications and, under existing MOUs, notifies FSIS and/or FDA when unsanitary conditions exist in the plant.

FSA purchases commercial items and utilizes a Contractor Quality Assurance requirement for all products purchased with the exception of rice and dairy products. The FAR states that contracts for commercial items shall rely on contractors' existing quality assurance systems as a substitute for Government inspection and testing before tender for acceptance unless customary market practices for the commercial item being acquired include in-process inspection. Any in-process inspection by the Government shall be conducted in a manner consistent with commercial practice. When contractor quality assurance is required:

- The contractor shall perform the product testing and quality analysis to ensure that the product meets the commodity specifications. The results shall be evidenced by a Certificate of Analysis (COA).
- Contractors shall notify the Government immediately of lots that fail to meet contract requirements.

FSA buys dairy products only from AMS approved plants. Plant approval is determined by unannounced inspections covering more than 100 items, including milk supply, plant facilities, condition of equipment, sanitary practices, and processing procedures. Depending on the specific item purchased, it is either certified by an AMS grader or the Contractor Quality Assurance requirement is utilized.

FSA requires milled rice products procured to be inspected for quality by the USDA, Federal Grain Inspection Service.

### **Product Specification Requirements:**

- All product must be U.S. produced and of domestic origin.
- In the event of a product hold or recall, the vendor must be able to trace all products supplied under the USDA contract.

- AMS Purchase documents specify criteria for commodity and non-commodity ingredients and impose processing requirements beyond those of FSIS and FDA. Food purchased by FSA is required to meet Commercial Product Specifications
- Products purchased by AMS that pose concern from a microbial standpoint are tested (beyond any testing that FSIS or FDA might require) to ensure processing sanitation and safety of the product.
  - AMS selects and approves the laboratories used by processors to conduct microbial testing. Lots that exceed limits for indicator organisms or test positive for E.coli O157:H7 or Salmonella are rejected.
  - Products include: Egg products, diced chicken, dried cranberries, dried cherries, trail mix, and dehydrated vegetable soup mix, raw ground beef and ground bison, boneless beef, and raw ground turkey.
- All canned fruit and vegetable products are subject to a 14-day post packing holding period to assure the products' wholesomeness and container integrity.
- Canned beef and pork must be processed, heat treated, and otherwise handled to meet FSIS and FDA requirements (assures kill of all micro-organisms) under FSIS supervision, including an incubation period for the canned product, and subject to AMS audits.
- Cooked ham must be produced under FSIS inspection and an AMS approved and audited plan that includes cooking to at least 155°F in "cook-in-ship" bags or casings that prevent contamination.
- Specific time and temperature requirements must be met for processing, chilling, and freezing of chicken and turkey products.
- Specific requirements are set for packaging, including type of packaging, evidence of tampering, film bag thickness, and absence of staples or wire.
- All fruit and vegetable suppliers must pass a yearly plant or packing facility audit that ensures that the vendor produces products in a clean, sanitary environment in accordance with the Food and Drug Administration's Good Manufacturing Practices.
- All fresh fruit and vegetable suppliers must also pass yearly Good Handling Practices and Good Agricultural Practices Audits.

### **Food Defense Requirements:**

- AMS vendors are required to have documented food defense plans in place that provide for the security of a plant's production processes and includes the storage and transportation of finished product after production. The plans are audited on at least an annual basis by AMS representatives.
- Vendors are required to secure all delivery units with tamper-proof, tamper resistant, serially numbered, high security seals on trucks and railcars transporting purchased food products.

### **Food Safety Contingencies:**

- In the event of a product recall or other food safety emergency such as suspected product tampering, AMS and FSA work closely with the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and the responsible food safety agency.
- When food safety concerns arise, AMS and FSA are quickly alerted by FDA, FSIS or FNS, as applicable. If it appears that USDA-purchased products may be involved, AMS and FSA assist in providing pertinent documents and other relevant information.